Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program

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NEWS RELEASE

August 1, 2012

For Immediate Release

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Remote Sensing Antenna to be Installed in Utah's White River to Monitor Endangered Fish

LAKEWOOD, Colo. – Researchers will have a new way to track the presence and movement of endangered fish in the White River in eastern Utah following the mid-August installation of a 120-foot-long, 3-foot-wide remote-sensing antenna. Researchers with the Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program will join representatives of Questar Pipeline Company and Biomark, Inc., to place the thermoplastic antenna on the bed of the river during low flows.

Once installed, the antenna will operate year-round and use radio frequencies to capture the movement of any fish implanted with a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag as they pass within 15-18 inches of the antenna's surface. A PIT tag is a small microchip in a glass capsule (about the size of a large grain of rice), like those placed in a dog or cat at a veterinary clinic for individual identification. The antenna will detect any endangered Colorado pikeminnow, razorback sucker, bonytail and humpback chub, as well as a variety of other native fishes that are PIT tagged. This will enable researchers to document fish movement, calculate population size and obtain weight, length, and age data.

The antenna will enable researchers to gain valuable insight into the movement patterns of tagged endangered and other native fishes, and eliminate the stress associated with repeated capture and release. In addition to the endangered fishes, the White River is home to large numbers of native flannelmouth and bluehead suckers, and roundtail chub, some of which have also been tagged.

"The White River, the second largest tributary to the Green River, is designated critical habitat for endangered fishes," said Recovery Program Director Tom Chart. "Having the ability to monitor their movement will help us

measure the effectiveness of our management actions as we work to recover them."

Utah's Questar Pipeline Company will fund the $125,000 project to help monitor potential impacts to endangered fish and their habitat that might occur when the company constructs a pipe across the White River as part of its Mainline 103 Extension Project. This project will replace about eight miles of older pipe with new 20-inch diameter pipe through a remote section of Weaver Canyon near the Utah/Colorado border.

"Questar Pipeline is committed to conducting all of its operations in an environmentally responsible manner" said Allan Bradley, Questar Pipeline president and CEO. "Because this project crosses the White River, which is home to endangered fish species, we're excited to be able to help contribute to the important work the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is doing to protect threatened wildlife and to promote a healthy and sustainable environment."

Questar Pipeline showed a strong environmental stewardship ethic during the discussions concerning the Mainline 103 pipeline project and the PIT tag reader," said U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Ecologist Kevin McAbee, who coordinated the project on behalf of the Recovery Program. "We commend Questar Pipeline for looking for new, innovative ways to help native fish conservation, and for their financial support. As more PIT tag readers are installed and operated throughout the Upper Colorado River Basin, our knowledge of native fish will be greatly bolstered."

The Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offices in Vernal, Utah, will operate and maintain the antenna, including data retrieval. Detections of endangered fishes will be provided to the Recovery Program to create a more complete picture of Upper Basin endangered fish populations.

UDWR will use detection data of non-listed native fish species to understand the complete fish community in the White River.

The Recovery Program previously installed similar detection devices at the Maybell Ditch, a 12-mile-long irrigation canal on the Yampa River in northwest Colorado and at the Price-Stubb Diversion Dam on the Colorado River in western Colorado.

The Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program is a cooperative partnership of local, state and federal agencies, water organizations, power customers and environmental groups established in 1988 to recover the endangered fishes while water development proceeds in accordance with federal and state laws and interstate compacts. For more information: 303-969-7322, or ColoradoRiverRecovery.org.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Two photos are available from Debbie Felker, 303-969-7322, ext. 227, debbie_felker@fws.gov.

Caption for photo labeled "River Upstream of Bridge": Questar Pipeline Company will fund and help install a remote sensing antenna in the White River in eastern Utah in August. The antenna will track the presence and movement of endangered Colorado River fishes to help recover the species. (Credit: Upper Colorado River Endangered Fish Recovery Program)

Caption for photo labeled Colorado pikeminnow by Joe Ferreira: The largest minnow in North America, the endangered Colorado pikeminnow is known to migrate up to 200 miles to spawn. The installation of a remote sensing antenna in the White River will enable researchers to determine their presence in the fishes' historic range.